# COGNITIVE SOCIOLINGUISTICS: A VIABLE APPROACH TO VARIATION IN LINGUISTIC THEORY

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THE AIM OF THIS PAPER[1] is to reconsider aspects of the relationship between sociolinguistic variation and linguistic theory. According to Casillas-Martínez, there have been two main approaches to sociolinguistic variation in linguistic theory. The first of these, the 'exclusion approach', has been a dominant trend in generative linguistics throughout the twentieth century (2003:33). Section 1 begins by tracing the history of this approach and questions the evidence that has been provided in support of it. Section 2 reviews a sample of research that is characteristic of the second approach—'variation as a side effect' (2003:34). This approach often results from the recognition that linguistic theory should be capable of explaining sociolinguistic variation and so attempts are often made to modify existing approaches that are, in all other respects, asocial. I will argue that, while these accounts appropriately question the legitimacy of the distinction between linguistic theory and sociolinguistic variation, their proposals to incorporate variation are problematic because they do not fully incorporate the social meaning of linguistic variants. In order to improve the synthesis between sociolinguistic variation and theories of language structure, I will argue that it is necessary to adopt a linguistic theory in which the social meaning of linguistic variation is a pre-existing aspect of the framework. Section 3 explains that this is the case with the theoretical approaches of the Cognitive Linguistics movement. I will therefore argue that these frameworks are fundamentally compatible with accounts of sociolinguistic variation and provide a more viable approach to socially motivated variation in linguistic theory.

1. THE EXCLUSION APPROACH. The complete exclusion of sociolinguistic variation from the concerns of theoretical linguistics can be traced to the 'structuralist' movement and the work of Ferdinand de Saussure in the early 20th century, although it was popularised in mainstream linguistic theory by the generative tradition that followed.

It seems, from the writings of *Cours de linguistique générale*,[2] that Saussure was dissatisfied with the shape of linguistics. Although the Neogrammarians had made 'great advances' in the field by establishing links between sequences of language change, according to the Course (p. 5/19), they had failed to explain the fundamental problem of linguistics: that of defining language as an object of scientific study. Until this was done, linguistics could not establish itself as a 'true science' (p. 3/16).

Saussure was acutely aware of the complexities involved in such a task. The Course explains that language is at once a dual activity on many levels; it is a combination of articulation and perception; sound and meaning; individual and social; present and past (pp.

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8–9/23–25). However, rather than attempt to create an all-encompassing 'science of language' that could incorporate each of these facets, Saussure's solution was to propose that 'the linguist must take the study of linguistic structure as his primary concern...' (p. 10/25). To do this, he had to define 'linguistic structure' as an object of study and show that it was different from all other aspects of language. This led Saussure to make a fundamental distinction between langue and parole.

Langue is described in the Course as the abstract formal linguistic system which exists in the mind of every speaker or, more accurately, community of speakers; it is acquired in the community and every member of that community will share an identical homogeneous langue (pp. 13–14/30). Parole, on the other hand, is the realisation of actual speech. This is described in the Course as the 'execution of langue'. Culler explains that in the act of parole, the speaker selects and combines elements of the linguistic system and gives these forms a concrete manifestation or realisation (1976:30). Linguistic variation, therefore, originates in parole but can only become a change to the linguistic system when it is accepted by the speech community and therefore becomes part of langue (Joseph 2004:48).

Aside from the initial description of the distinction, there is very little mention of parole in the Course because it insists that the primary strategic function of distinguishing between langue and parole is to isolate the 'true' object of linguistic enquiry and so 'disregard everything which does not belong to its structure as a system...' (p. 21/40). All linguistic variation was therefore relegated to parole and considered unimportant to the 'true science' of language.[3]

Although Saussure was responsible for introducing the dichotomy between language structure and language use, it was Chomsky who strengthened it further by advocating a more rigid dichotomy between 'competence' and 'performance' (1965:3–4).[4]

This is described as the distinction between 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language' and 'the actual use of language in concrete situations' (Chomsky 1965:4). In other words, the former relates to the mental structures that govern linguistic behaviour and the latter to linguistic behaviour itself. In many respects, competence is therefore similar to Saussure's concept of langue. However, unlike langue, competence is not considered to be a social product. For Chomsky, linguistic competence is biologically determined, universal, and a property of the individual, not of the community. This has been articulated recently as the 'innateness hypothesis', i.e. the assumption that language structures are not learned, they are innately present in the human mind and they are triggered by linguistic 'input' (see Pinker 1994, Smith & Tsimpli 1995).[5]

Like Saussure, Chomsky argues that the structural characteristics of language must be the linguists' primary object of concern. The key purpose of linguistic theory is to describe the combinatory rules or 'generative grammar' of a language. Chomsky's earlier work (1957, 1965) implies that sociolinguistic variation is simply uninteresting from a theoretical perspective. This is articulated more explicitly in later work in which he compares the study of sociolinguistic variation with 'butterfly collecting': 'If you like butterflies, that's fine; but such work must not be confounded with research...' (1979:57). Chomsky believes that studies of sociolinguistic variation in language use constitute 'good descriptive linguistics'



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(1979:55) and that they are helpful in combating linguistic prejudices but that they are also 'banal' because they do not attempt to relate their findings to linguistic theory.

The theory deficit is a common criticism of variationist sociolinguistics,[6] yet sociolinguists question exactly which theoretical advances they should relate their findings to. There is no single theoretical model that is unanimously favoured amongst linguists (this article should serve as evidence of this). Also, as Chambers (1995:29) suggests, certain 'advances' in linguistic theory (within the generativist tradition at least) have either now been discarded or been so radically revised that any attempt to synthesise sociolinguistic accounts of language change and variation with these theoretical proposals would have seriously weakened the variationist cause. Regarding this dichotomy between theoretical linguistics and sociolinguistics, Trousdale observes that 'it would seem that the battle lines are fairly well drawn' (2003:373). Yet there is evidence from both sides of the division that the strict dichotomy has begun to be questioned. For example, from the 'sociolinguists' side of the fence, Cameron argues that 'if sociolinguistics is to progress from description to explanation...it is obviously in need of a theory linking the "linguistic" to the "socio"' (Cameron 1997:59).

From the 'theorists' side, Hudson explains that such a suggestion is entirely possible because 'it is possible to formalize the content of sociolinguistic knowledge, and to do so using the same formal apparatus as for structural knowledge' (1986:1075).

Perhaps we should therefore at least question the necessity of the assumed distinction. Why should variation automatically be excluded from accounts of language structure? Saussure's explanation for the necessity of the division was that we must focus our attention on langue because 'it is the one thing that is independently definable and provides something our minds can satisfactorily grasp' (p. 9/25). Of course, this is clearly not the case; langue has proven be an extremely difficult notion to define. Chomsky's justification for the distinction seems even weaker. He explains that it was the position assumed by his predecessors (i.e. Saussure and the structuralists) 'and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered' (1965:4).

This is precisely the problem that Hudson (1986, 1996) finds with the exclusion approach, arguing that the debate over the exact nature of the distinction is futile because those who make such a distinction provide no evidence in support of their argument (1986:1056). Hudson (1986, 1996) illustrates his concerns with the example *sidewalk* (1996:245–7). He explains that speakers of English know (at least) four things about this word: They know its pronunciation, its meaning and its word class. This type of 'linguistic knowledge' is typically subsumed under the scope of linguistic competence and deemed worthy of investigation in theoretical linguistics. However, speakers of English also know that this word is an Americanism. This is typically regarded as knowledge of language use and therefore not explored in theories of language structure. Yet if this is also an aspect of 'linguistic knowledge' then, Hudson asks, why shouldn't this type of fact also belong with linguistic competence? The boundary that is assumed to exist between 'linguistic' and 'non-linguistic' knowledge rests on a belief held in mainstream (generative) linguistic theory that linguistic competence is a unique (innate and universal) aspect of the total knowledge of an individual. However, this assumption in itself is extremely controversial (for an overview of



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the current debate, see Pinker 1994 and Tomasello 1995). It therefore seems that those who continue to propose the distinction between 'linguistic' and 'non-linguistic' knowledge not only fail to question the legitimacy of the distinction but base their assumptions only on the logic they have inherited from the structuralist tradition.

2. SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION AS A 'SIDE EFFECT'. It therefore seems clear that a theory of grammar that aims to be a comprehensive and realistic model of human language must fully incorporate the social facts of language use. This recognition has resulted in the second approach to sociolinguistic variation found in linguistic theory, described by Casillas-Martínez as 'variation as a side-effect' (2003:34). These approaches explain that linguistic theory should be able to explain linguistic variation and so attempts are often made to modify existing approaches that are fundamentally asocial.[7]

2.1 PRINCIPLES AND PARAMETERS. Wilson and Henry (1998) employ the concept of parameters to explain variable data in synchronic variation between Belfast English and Standard English. Parameters were introduced to generative linguistic theory in an attempt to explain variable outputs between linguistic systems. The general assumption is that variation between languages is the result of differences in parameter settings.[8] They take this argument a step further and ask 'what if specific dialects of English can be shown to have their own parameter settings?' (1998:7). Re-examining data from Henry (1995) that deals with verb raising, they explain that, unlike Standard English, verb-raising in imperatives is possible in Belfast English and sentences like examples (1) and (2) are grammatical:

(1) Read you that
(2) Go you away (1998:9).

Wilson and Henry (1998:9) explain that, in a Principles and Parameters account of this variation, there are two possible grammars in Belfast English with respect to inverted imperatives: one allowing inversion with all verbs (so both examples 1 and 2 are grammatical) and one allowing only inversion with 'unaccusative verbs' (which they describe as verbs of motion, such as in example 2 above). There are therefore two different parameter settings in Belfast English and, for speakers who then switch between these two parameters and Standard English, there are three different parameters relating to verb raising. In order to accept this account, it is necessary to accept that speakers who vary between these forms are switching between three different grammars (see also Kroch 1994).

Wilson and Henry argue that their methods are capable of highlighting the interaction that exists between 'internal' and 'external' linguistic factors. However, in terms of their Principles and Parameters approach, they seem unable to explain why such variation exists at all. How can the numerous social motivations for linguistic variation and change that have been discovered in sociolinguistic research (such as age, class, gender, ethnicity etc.) also be incorporated into the Principles and Parameters approach? They recognize their limitations in this respect, explaining that they are 'not arguing that the systematic



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variation found within Belfast English, or any other dialects, may be explained ONLY by invoking parameters' (1998:14).

2.2 MINIMALISM. Wilson and Henry's (1998) approach to variation in Principles and Parameters assumes that speakers can essentially have more than one system of grammatical knowledge and variation is therefore the result of decisions that speakers make about the choice of particular grammatical systems. The approach to variation assumed by Adger and Smith (2005) is similar to this as it also places an emphasis on 'choice'. However, Adger and Smith's account does not invoke a range of different grammatical systems to explain variation; rather there is only one grammatical mechanism assumed, 'containing universal mechanisms'.

The Minimalist account they propose (based on an adaptation of Chomsky's Minimalist Program, see Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001) assumes the existence of two different types of syntactic features: those which carry a semantic interpretation (and are labelled interpretable) such as the feature [tense: past] in English and those which do not (and so are uninterpretable) such as the syntactic feature [*u*case: nominative] in English.[9] Uninterpretable features must be checked by a matching feature during the derivation and be deleted. This means that only interpretable features will be delivered to the semantic component of the grammar. Morphemes will then be associated with the remaining feature bundles and whatever morphological operations that are triggered by these feature specifications (e.g. the addition of an affix) will then be performed. Finally, the grammar will perform the phonological operations necessary to achieve the surface form.

Adger and Smith examine variation in two morphosyntactic variables (*do* absence and *was/were* alternation) in data collected from Buckie, a fishing town in the north east of Scotland. Most dialects of English which display variation in *was/were* do so across all grammatical persons. In Buckie, however, there is variable use in all contexts except with the pronoun *they* (which can only occur with the plural form of the verb). *Do* absence appears to be restricted to negative declarative sentences and in contexts with 3rd person singular pronouns, NPs and plural NPs. In other words, both of these variables show a categorical and variable distinction in the patterning of variants. Also, use of the non-standard form in *was/were* variation is stratified by age across all variable contexts. The variation in *was/were* is therefore (at least partially) socially motivated, indicating that this variable is perhaps undergoing change in this community with younger speakers favouring the standard form. The data on *do*-absence shows no such pattern, suggesting that this variable is both stable and perhaps also less salient.

The Minimalist framework can account for this variation by proposing that 'variation arises from lexical items having, by the end of the syntactic derivation, the same interpretable feature specification coupled with different uninterpretable and phonological specifications' (Adger & Smith 2005:153). In other words, there are essentially two distinct syntactic inputs, or lexical items, to the system which can produce exactly the same semantic output. But if uninterpretable features are checked and deleted how can this result in different phonological outputs for these syntactic inputs? Adger and Smith confront this problem by assuming that checked features are, in fact, not deleted and that they are still accessible



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to the morphological component of the grammar leading to a difference in the 'spell out' of syntactic inputs. For example, in order to explain the variation that occurs between '*was*' and '*were*', they assume the existence of two variants of the lexeme 'be' (arbitrarily labelled label *T* and *T2*) which give the same semantic output but which have different featural content, leading to a different 'spell out' of each variant at the surface form. If a speaker selects [be *T*] as the syntactic input, the unspecified features of case, number and person will be checked with the unspecified features of the pronoun and, if the pronoun is [pers 1] (i.e. 1st person plural) then the derivation will run and the 'spell out' will be *were*. However, the featural content of *T2* differs from *T* and the morphology will be sensitive to this, instead spelling out *was*.

They also provide a similar account of variation for *do*-absence, although they assume that this variation arises from the choice of morpheme associated with a lexical item by the 'spell out' mechanism. They explain that the framework can straightforwardly capture the variation in *do*-absence by assuming that the morpheme associated with the 1st and 2nd person singular has two forms: [+ affix] which is realised as '*do*' and [- affix] which is not realised overtly. Adger and Smith are therefore able to incorporate linguistic variation easily into the theoretical framework with little adjustment to the model.

The model that they propose assumes that variation is the result of a choice made by the speaker. Adger and Smith's explanation amounts essentially to the same as describing *was/were* variation as a choice between lexical items (cf. the choice between *sidewalk* and *pavement* discussed above) and *do*-absence as a choice between different allomorphs of a particular morpheme, although they claim that the choice is made at a deeper level of language structure (i.e. speakers do not choose '*was*' or '*were*'; they chose *T* or *T2* and this results in the output '*was*' or '*were*'). However, like Wilson and Henry, they do not explain why speakers make such a choice, because they do not incorporate the social meaning of these variants into the theoretical framework. They acknowledge that the variation may in part (at least in the case of *was/were* variation) be socially motivated, but they regard this as 'outside the grammar proper' (2005:173) and so outside of their scope of concern.

The approaches examined in this section therefore share Casillas-Martinez' notion of variation as a 'side effect'. They begin with a purely asocial theory of grammar and try to build in accounts of variation, but they only build in the results of such variation, leaving no place for the social motivation of the variation in the theoretical framework. Casillas-Martinez argues that 'we do not need a grammatical theory that gives us the right numbers for a socially meaningful variable, *what we need is a grammatical theory that links variables with social meanings*...' (2003:34, emphasis added).

The theoretical frameworks of the Cognitive Linguistics movement may offer this feature.

## 3. COGNITIVE SOCIOLINGUISTICS

3.1 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS. Cognitive Linguistics is the general cover term applied to a range of theoretical approaches in modern linguistics that have been developed since the late 1970s. Cognitive Linguistic theories share with the generative tradition the belief that language is a 'cognitive' phenomenon in the sense that it is a product of the mind of



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the individual. However, they offer a radical alternative to mainstream generativist theories of grammar, differing in several key respects, not least in that they aim to model the facts of linguistic structure as it is used and understood by speakers. Geeraerts summarises the difference between the theoretical traditions of generativists and cognitivists as follows:

> The cognitive linguist is interested in our knowledge of the world, and studies how natural language contributes to it. The generativist linguist, conversely, is interested in our knowledge of the language, and asks how such knowledge can be acquired, given a cognitive theory of learning. (1995:113)

Specific theories within Cognitive Linguistics share certain basic assumptions regarding the nature of language in the mind. The first of these assumptions is that language acquisition should involve mechanisms that are not unique to learning language. If language is acquired through repetition and exposure, language structure therefore must emerge from language use. This means that language acquisition is considered to be a 'bottom-up' process, in opposition to the 'top-down' nature of generative grammar (Tomasello 2000). Theories which adopt this position have become known as *'usage-based'* models of language (Barlow & Kemmer 2000)[10]. Because the linguistic structure that is abstracted is largely determined by a speaker's previous experience (Langacker 1987:380), and because no two speakers will have had exactly the same linguistic experiences, each speaker will abstract a (minimally) different grammar. Linguistic variation between speakers is therefore inevitable and, in Cognitive Linguistics, already presupposed by the theoretical framework (Geeraerts 2003:1).

A second major difference between Cognitive Linguistics and generative theories is that Cognitive Linguistics assumes that linguistic structures and processes do not emerge from any specific language module of the mind but are instead regarded as instances of general cognitive abilities (such as perception, attention, memory, emotion, reasoning, inferencing, categorisation etc.). In other words, Cognitive Linguistic theories share a fundamentally *non-modular view of language*. This has several important consequences for our approach to variation in linguistic theory. For instance, by claiming that language is essentially non-modular, Cognitive Linguistic theories are recognising that the division between langue and parole or competence and performance is arbitrary. 'Linguistic' knowledge is inextricably entwined with 'non-linguistic' knowledge or, as Goldberg states: 'knowledge of language is knowledge' (1995:5).

This is articulated more precisely in the assumption that *meaning is encyclopaedic*. Cognitive Linguists (invoking evidence from cognitive psychology) have argued that meaning is part of a larger system of interlocking networks of knowledge in cognition (see Hudson 2007:8). In this respect, the meaning of a linguistic unit cannot simply be equated with a narrow set of dictionary definitions. It involves all of our general knowledge, including *social* and *pragmatic* knowledge that we associate with the linguistic unit (such as the 'type' of speaker likely to use this form, the type of speech event in which it is likely to be used etc). Encyclopaedic knowledge is therefore embedded in a more general socio-cognitive process and social meaning can readily be accommodated into the framework. It seems,



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therefore, that in contrast to the generative approaches outlined above, the basic assumptions of the Cognitive Linguistics movement are fundamentally compatible with a description of sociolinguistic variation. How does this work in practice?

3.2 APPLICATION TO VARIABLE DATA. If Cognitive Sociolinguistics it is to become a serious contribution to both sociolinguistics and Cognitive Linguistics, it must be validated by the successful application of the theory to a corpus of 'real' data collected from 'real' speakers. My corpus (86,000 words) was collected from a group of 16 adolescents (12 males and 4 females) who play together in a juvenile pipe band in Fife.[11] The data were collected over the course of a year using the ethnographic technique of long-term participant observation.

One motivation for using ethnography as a method of data collection was that I was keen to avoid the types of style shift that are typical during an interview between strangers. For instance, Ellen Douglas-Cowie's (1978) work has shown that there is often a 'familiarity effect'—as the subjects become more familiar with the interviewer, they progressively shift to using more 'non-standard' variants. Although my corpus did avoid a familiarity effect (to the extent that this is possible), it contains many examples of style shifting that can be described as 'performance speech' (Schilling-Estes 1998; Preston 1992, 1996) such as (3), where the speaker, Lucy, is describing an event that has taken place in her Maths class and adopts the role of various actors in her performance of the event.

(3) **L:** the day right, this guy came tae ma class late eh an he had a late slip an he wiz like, [teacher style]'does it take ye ten minutes tae get here' cos he'd got his late slip but then em he'd came in at ten past an he got it on like on the o'clock. Right [laughs] an then he came in tae ma class an he wiz like, [teacher style] 'does it take ye ten minutes tae get tae this class' an he sat **doon**. I went, 'nah, he wiz **ootside** haen a fag' [laughs] an he went, 'shurup' like this an a'hing an he wiz total goin 'shut it man' like this an a wiz like, 'nae boer'. An then, an then Lauren went, 'aye he wiz haen a pash' like that cos in Dundee that's what they call a fag right cos a' the folk we met at the army they were goin, 'comin for a pash' cos it means 'comin for a fag' right.

**LC:** right ok

**L:** but he thought he said, 'he wiz goin for a pish' right [laughing]. An he went, [teacher style] 'Lauren. **Out**!' and she's goin, 'nu' a never meant it. A never even swore. What ye talking **aboot**?' an he's total goin [teacher style] '**Out**!' An she wiznae goin **oot**, she's sitting like this an then a wiz total pu'en her back an a wiznae letting her go an a wiz hodin ontae her like under like that an she's, she's trying tae get up an she's goin, 'it's Lucy, she's hodin on tae me' an am goin 'no am no' like this an a'hing. She-he's goin, em, an then Ashley's sitting goin, sittin shoutin, 'a pash, a pash' like trying tae get sent **oot** tae eh, an a wiz like, 'a' right'. She's a total gimp. It wiz just so funny cos he thought she said pish an she didnae. She got sent **oot** total [laughs]... we iyewiz get sent **oot** me an her for talking.



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Traditionally, sociolinguists have tended to dismiss performance speech because their focus has been on understanding unselfconscious 'natural' speech or 'the vernacular'. This was articulated explicitly in Labov's 'Vernacular Principle' (1972:112) which has led (variationist) sociolinguists to focus less on self-conscious speech because it is assumed that this will be more reflective of the language used in the speech community. However, Schilling-Estes (1998) has argued that valuable insights about language variation can be gained through investigating performance speech.

For instance, notice in example (3) the variation that affects words of the OUT lexical set (highlighted in bold in the text). This has two variants for these speakers: a high rounded monophthong (which is the typically 'Scots' pronunciation and is represented with a double *o* spelling) and a diphthong (the 'Standard' variant, represented with an *ou* spelling). In this example of performance speech, all instances of the monophthong variant occur when Lucy is imitating either her own speech or the speech of her peers and all instances of the diphthong variant occur when Lucy is imitating the speech style of her teacher.

For many of the speakers in this corpus, the use of the diphthong variant is considered to be the 'proper' or 'posh' form (see example 4) while the monophthong variant is characterised as 'Scottish' or 'slang' (see example 5).

(4) **LC:** so what aboot if ye were in a job interview?

**S:** aye you'd hae tae speak proper then cos you're wanting, ken you're no wanting tae go in an be like 'aye, how ye daen pal'

**LC:** how no?

**S:** cos yer wantin tae impress them eh. Ken you're no hink-no wantin them tae hink you've just crawled oot the gutter or nuhin

**LC:** give me an example eh how ye wid talk...would ye say 'hoose' or 'house'?

**S and R:** house

...

**LC:** what dae ye hink eh people that say 'house' instead eh hoose a' the time?

**R:** posh

(5) **LC:** is hoose slang?

**S:** aye

**C:** /nu' hoose is Scottish

**S:** is it?

**C:** aye cos a'bdy says hoose

**LC:** what aboot folk that say house?

**C:** they're proper

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By examining performance speech such as in (3), it becomes clear how these variants can acquire such social meanings. The extract in (3) shows that this speaker has recognized a relationship of similarity between the diphthong variant of this variable and a particular instance of a social type: her maths teacher. In other words, performance speech shows that speakers are aware that certain linguistic variants are used by certain types of speakers in certain social situations or domains.

In Cognitive Grammar terms, speakers abstract over salient displays of style (such as dress, behavior and speech) and then use these as 'cognitive reference points' (Langacker 1999:173–202) or landmarks in cognition which can, with frequency of occurrence, become stored in long-term memory. Recall from section 3.1 that Cognitive Linguistic models assume a non-modular view of language and regard linguistic knowledge as part of a larger system of knowledge in cognition. This feature of the model therefore allows connections to be made in the mind between social *and* linguistic knowledge (such as the social type 'teacher' and the diphthong variant of this variable). The repeated co-activation and, hence, entrenchment of particular (social and linguistic) nodes and links in the cognitive network enables the individual to associate social knowledge with particular linguistic variants and for these variants, in turn, to take on social meaning.

For instance, if an individual hears the diphthong variant of the OUT variable for the first time used by a teacher, they will abstract a relationship between the linguistic variant and the social type 'teacher'. If the individual only ever experiences this diphthong variant through interaction with teachers, then this association will strengthen (become more entrenched) in their mind and the variant will become a marker of the social type 'teacher'. However, the individual may also experience the diphthong variant used by other social 'types' (as is the case for these informants). Individuals will then make generalisations over these social types, abstracting commonality between them. Naturally, as the number of social types increases, the commonality that is shared between them will broaden, leading to a more abstract social category such as 'posh' or 'proper'. By association with this social category (or schema), the linguistic variant then takes on the social meaning 'posh' or 'proper'.

The main benefit of invoking a Cognitive account of linguistic structure (over some of the generative approaches reviewed above) when dealing with sociolinguistic variation is therefore that Cognitive models of language structure do not discard social meaning as 'outside the grammar proper'; they can offer a more unified approach to variation by fully incorporating social meaning into the theoretical framework. This is important because it is exactly this task that is occupying many (third wave) sociolinguists—they are becoming increasingly interested in the relationship between linguistic variation and social meaning at the local level and are asking the question 'how do variables mean?' (Eckert 2002:4).

4. CONCLUSION. It has been my aim in this article to highlight the cross-over that exists between the disciplines of sociolinguistics and linguistic theory. In mainstream (generative) linguistic theory, this cross-over has caused problems for the asocial theories concerned, which were not initially designed to model variation. In Cognitive Linguistic theories of language, the cross-over is implied in the theoretical framework. However, it



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is still largely unexplored and in the emerging cases in which it has been investigated, the emphasis has been primarily on the capability of the theoretical model to handle variation rather than on the application of the model to linguistic data. Although this article also provides a rather programmatic approach, I have suggested that examples of performance speech may provide a useful starting point for such research. Performance speech provides evidence of the relationship between social meaning and linguistic variation and Cognitive Linguistics offers a framework in which to analyse this relationship in the mind of the individual speaker.

[1] Earlier versions of this research were presented at the 16th Sociolinguistic Symposium, University of Limerick, 2006. I wish to thank Graeme Trousdale and Miriam Meyerhoff for their helpful comments on earlier drafts and presentations. I would also like to express my gratitude to my informants for welcoming me into their community and their lives and allowing me access to such rich and entertaining data. Finally, I must acknowledge the helpful comments of the anonymous reviewers.

[2] *Cours de linguistique générale* (*Course in general linguistics*) was published posthumously in 1916 from a collection of students' notes, based on a series of lectures that Saussure delivered at the University of Geneva between 1907 and 1911. When referencing his work, I will use the standard system of including two page numbers: The first is from the English translation by Baskin (Saussure 1960) and the second is from the French original, edited by de Mauro (Saussure 1973). E.g. in 'p. 21/40', 21 is the English page number and 40 is the French.

[3] Although Saussure recognised that 'external' elements of language 'are concerned with important matters' (in which he includes knowledge of the relationships that exist between languages/dialects, various population movements, political and geographic factors and the development of literary languages) he sees no reason to suggest that any of these factors must be taken into account when studying the internal structure of language (p. 21/40).

[4] This was later developed into a distinction between I-Language and E-Language (Chomsky 1986). I-Language is similar to the concept of competence in that it represents internal linguistic knowledge but E-Language encompasses even more than performance.

[5] For a counter argument to the innateness hypotheses, see Tomasello (1995) and Sampson (1997).

[6] For example, see Spolsky (1998:7–8).

[7] Perhaps the first attempt to develop an existing theory of language structure towards the incorporation of variation in language use was the idea of 'variable rules' (hereafter VR), proposed initially by Weinreich *et al.* (1968) and then modified by Labov (1969, 1972:chapter 8) and Cedergren and Sankoff (1974). A more recent approach that draws on many of the same assumptions as VR is OT (see Evanini's contribution to this volume for an overview).

[8] This approach rests on the 'common sense' assumption that languages such as 'English' exist as definable linguistic entities. The argument is therefore circular: The definition of parameters rests on the supposition of the existence of different languages which are defined as differences in parameter setting.

[9] Adger and Smith (2005) notate uninterpretable features by prefixing them with a *u*.



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[10] A 'usage-based' approach is based on the idea that linguistic knowledge is largely composed of low-level schematic generalizations and that the schemas which do emerge 'spring from the soil of actual usage' (Langacker 2000:1) i.e. language is acquired on the basis of encounters with actually occurring expressions.

[11] These data form part of the corpus collected for Clark (2005). This was a pilot study that was conducted for an MSc dissertation with the intention of expanding the research into a larger PhD project.



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